

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 14 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 10.00 AM TO 12.17 PM**

Schools Representatives

Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Emma Clarke	Primary Head - Farley Hill Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary - Vice Chairman
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Ben Godber	Academy Head - Bohunt School
Derren Gray	Academy Head - Piggott School
Ginny Rhodes	Academy Head - St Crispins School
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
Shirley Austin	Academy Head - Forest School
Sian Lehrter	School Business Director - The Holt School
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Liz Woodards	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Jay Blundell	Pupil Referral Unit Head - Foundry College

Non School Representatives

Sal Thirlway	Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships
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Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Paul Miller was elected Chairman of Schools Forum for the 2020/21 academic year.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Brian Prebble was appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2020/21 academic year.

3 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Kerry Clifford and Nick McSweeney.

4 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Derren Gray, on the basis that he was the Headteacher for the school that would be asking to submit a request for disapplication to the Department for Education (DfE). Derren Gray left the meeting for that item and did not take part in any discussions or vote.

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 15 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to a typing correction on page 10 (where it said '*principals*' it should read principles), and would be signed at a later date by the Chairman.

6 MATTERS ARISING UPDATE

All matters arising would be covered during discussions at the meeting.

7 2020/21 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager presented the 2020/21 Revenue Monitoring report.

Katherine Vernon stated that an in-year deficit of £2.6m was projected, with the pressure continuing to be within the High Needs Block (HNB). Taken with the brought forward deficit of £3.36m, a forecast cumulative deficit of £5.98m was now projected to 31 March 2021.

Katherine Vernon stated that there was a further deficit movement of £1.09m on the figure reported previously to Schools Forum, the main movements were due to increased numbers and costs across:

- Out of Borough maintained
- Post-16
- Independent Special and Non-Maintained

Katherine Vernon stated that schools were facing additional financial pressures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Carol Simpson stated that a lot of schools were talking about the loss of income resulting from the current situation. However, there was no joined up approach to deal with the situation as yet;
- Ian Morgan stated that although Early Years was funded differently from schools, the sector was also facing significant financial difficulties as a result of loss of income during this period;
- Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning Achievement and Partnerships stated that he welcomed a dialogue with Schools Forum to form a long term strategy to deal with the current challenges;
- In relation to the exceptional costs associated with coronavirus claims that had been approved by the Department for Education (DfE), Jay Blundell asked if there was a pattern to a successful claim;
- Katherine Vernon stated that she did not know the specifics of each school's claims;
- Paul Miller suggested that best practice should be shared with schools, and asked for ideas as to how best to discuss and communicate this information to schools;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the local authority could put forward a claim to the DfE on Schools Forum's behalf;
- In response to a question Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist confirmed that additional financial pressures on schools, as a result of the pandemic, were anticipated this year. Schools Forum would be kept informed through the regular revenue monitoring of maintained schools; she pointed out that the local authority did not have the same level of information for academy schools. She agreed to contact schools about their challenges during this time and report back to Schools Forum.

Schools Forum considered that the Primary and Secondary Headteacher groups and other groups would be the best place to carry out discussions about how to deal with the financial losses resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Carol Simpson suggested that schools be contacted by the local authority to ascertain their position in relation to loss of income during this time. Katherine Vernon stated that maintained schools had already been contacted during the summer and there was an indication of a loss of £600k in income. Lynne Samuel stated that it was the service's intention to continue to gather information and share it with Schools Forum.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) The next monitoring report will include more information around the financial pressures being faced by schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

8 2020/21 CONTINGENCY UPDATE

Katherine Vernon presented the 2020/21 Contingency Update report.

Katherine Vernon stated that there were no allocations from the de-delegated fund to date in 2021 and that the Early Years Provider Reserve Fund of £203,376 was fully allocated in 2019/20.

Katherine Vernon stated that the Early Years Task and Finish Group would meet again in January to discuss the formula and budget setting for the following year.

Ian Morgan stated that the sector appreciated the recent payment from the contingency fund which had been made to providers.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

9 2021/22 DSG BUDGET PLANNING UPDATE

Katherine Vernon presented the 2021/22 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Budget Planning Update report.

Katherine Vernon stated that there had been an overall increase of 4% to the 2021/22 allocation compared to this year's allocation, the Early Years allocation would be known in December.

Katherine Vernon stated that the DfE had made limited changes to the funding arrangements due to the pandemic, as listed in the report. The Task and Finish Group had met, gone through various models and put forward recommendations as listed in the report.

Katherine Vernon stated that a consultation was sent out to schools in September on the principles to be applied to the 2021/22 Schools Budget. Schools were asked five questions and the responses received were as follows:

- 1) Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to keep it at 1% - 80% said yes
- 2) Transferring 0.5% from the Schools Block to another Block - 52% said yes

- 3) Keeping the primary to secondary ratio at 1:1.29 – 92% said yes
- 4) To move towards the National Funding Formula (NFF) Factors over 3 years – 96% said yes
- 5) Mobility factor – whether to move towards the NFF – 68% said yes

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Corrina Gillard stated that she had discussed question number 2 with her cluster and she found that the question had not been clear to schools. Schools in her cluster had asked that it be reported to Schools Forum that if the question had been clearer they would have replied 'no';
- Lynne Samuel stated that the question about moving 0.5% was about the principle of moving it to another Block; she believed that the result represented a more positive response than in previous years;
- Corrina Gillard stated that Headteachers needed more information about the Blocks in order to make an informed decision;
- Derren Gray stated that the option to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB had not been discussed at the Task and Finish Group because Schools Forum had not been in favour of this option in the past. He asked if there was a breakdown of the responses and Katherine Vernon stated that there was not, as the survey was anonymous;
- Sal Thirlway indicated that the closing date for the local authority to make a disapplication request to the DfE was 20 November;
- Brian Prebble stated that schools needed a better understanding of how the money would be used in order to make an informed decision;
- Corrina Gillard pointed out that schools were facing financial difficulties due to the current situation and needed to fully understand how this would impact their budgets;
- Ginny Rhodes stated that the percentage of schools that responded 'yes' to the question was not significantly high. She believed that members of Schools Forum had a good understanding of how the Blocks worked and were in a better position to make a decision;
- Ben Godber was of the opinion that schools should be consulted again with more information;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the local authority had to have regards to the results of the survey, he offered to consult again with schools on this point;
- Shirley Austin stated that the wording of the consultation had been vague, and she asked that Schools Forum review the wording of any further surveys to ensure that questions were made clear to schools.

Upon being put to the vote, Schools Forum decided that the local authority should consult with schools again, with a clearly worded question, about the possibility of transferring 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB. It was agreed that the Task and Finish Group would review the wording of the question before this was sent out to schools.

Lynne Samuel stated that the local authority was only required to apply for a disapplication if Schools Forum was not in favour of it and the local authority believed that it was the right approach.

It was agreed that the outcome of the consultation would be shared with Schools Forum. Upon being put to the vote, Schools Forum decided that it would support the outcome of the survey.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) Schools would be consulted again about the possibility of transferring 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block; and
- 3) Schools Forum would support the outcome of the survey.

10 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS TASK & FINISH GROUP UPDATE

The School Admissions Task and Finish Group Update report was presented by Sal Thirlway.

Sal Thirlway stated that the School Admissions Task and Finish Group was being created to replace School Admissions Forum, and it would report to Schools Forum. The progress of development of the Group had been delayed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report contained the draft terms of reference for Schools Forum to comment. The first meeting of the group was due to take place in November.

In response to a question about membership, Sal Thirlway stated that the schools federations would be asked to nominate representatives to the Group. To start with, the Group would be composed of the previous members of School Admissions Forum.

Schools Forum asked that the Group include in its membership a representative from special schools, in addition to the seven members proposed.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) A special school representative would be included in the membership of the School Admissions Task and Finish Group.

11 GROWTH FUND STRATEGIC UPDATE

Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist presented the Growth Fund Strategic Update report.

Some of the points made by Piers Brunning during his presentation are listed below:

- The Growth Fund related to the planning for education up to the age of 16;
- In planning the Growth Fund, the following factors were considered:
 - Changing local birth rates;
 - The impact of migration into the Borough (particularly into new homes);
 - The number of children moving across Borough boundaries for their education;
 - Independent education and home education were considered secondary factors.
- Although there was no statutory need to plan future school provision, there was a statutory requirement to ensure there were sufficient school places;
- Growth was expected around the strategic development locations;
- The Council had adopted strategies for school places for both primary and secondary school phases;
- The secondary strategy had identified two priorities:
 - A likely need for up to 100 additional Year 7 places from 2019/20

- Preparatory work for 270 permanent places after 2019/20 requirement
- The number of places which were required were impacted by cross borough movement;
- Demand for places in the Shinfield area had grown due to the housebuilding programme, the new Alder Grove CofE School was now open;
- Demand had also risen in Arborfield but with no need for extra capacity yet;
- No additional capacity was required in Woodley this year;
- In relation to the secondary allocation, the number of places on offer day differed from the number of places taken in September;
- Matthews Green and Arborfield Primary schools would require support from the Growth Fund in the near future;
- There was no expectation that a new secondary school would be required in the next decade. However, there may be a need to support Year 7 growth classes;
- The impact of the accelerated housebuilding in the Borough, in light of the National Planning Policy needed to be considered;
- It was the Council's intention to provide school places near to where children lived; in order to minimise traffic congestion, minimise Council home to school transport spend and maximise the achievement of parental preferences;
- Research suggested that if children lived within one mile of their school, they were more likely to walk to school, this changed dramatically if the distance was two miles or more.

During the discussion of the item following the comments were made:

- Shirley Austin stated that there were currently 135 places available in Year 7 at her school and questioned the numbers in relation to the likely need for additional places in Year 7 (on page 46 of the report);
- Piers Brunning stated that at the offer day all places were allocated, and capacity had been reached. He stated that the numbers had since fallen back and pointed out that the Forest School only offered places for boys. Shirley Austin stated Emmbrook and Waingels both had places for girls;
- Piers Brunning stated that Emmbrook and Waingels were the only schools in the Borough with surplus capacity (for boys and girls) this year;
- Paul Miller stated that the comment about additional places needed further clarification in the report;
- Corrina Gillard asked when Matthews Green Primary School was going to open. Piers Brunning stated that a decision had not yet been made, he agreed to keep schools informed on this; he anticipated that this would be in 2022;
- Paul Miller asked who made the decision of when to open the new school. Piers Brunning stated that this decision would be made by the Director in consultation with the Lead Member;
- Shirley Austin pointed out that since the Covid-19 pandemic, more students were cycling to school;
- Shirley Austin asked what was the percentage of pupils that went to independent schools and grammar schools, and how this impacted on the planning of school places in the Borough. She also asked for the data on the current numbers of pupils at all schools, in all year groups in the Borough.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and

2) Piers Brunning would provide a response to the questions raised at the meeting.

12 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK / SEND STRATEGY UPDATE

Sal Thirlway presented the High Needs Block/SEND Strategy Update report.

Some of the comments made by Sal Thirlway are listed below:

- The Task and Finish Group was very near to the conclusion of the final draft of the strategy. The strategy would then be sent out to consultation with key stakeholders and he anticipated that it would be ready for adoption in December;
- Data and performance reporting and intelligence was being improved;
- There had been an improvement in the timeliness and quality of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP);
- There had been a year on year increase in the number of EHCPs (21%), which was having a significant impact on the provision of SEND in the Borough;
- A lot of activity was now re-commencing after a period of re-deployment in response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- It was hoped that Chiltern Way Academy Trust would become the new provider for Northern House;
- The increase in the number of EHCPs had impacted the HNB deficit and the need to use independent non-maintained provisions;
- The funding arrangements in the partnerships with Education, Health and Social Care were being reviewed to ensure efficiencies were being maximised;
- Since the last report to Forum, there had been a further deficit movement of £1m in the HNB.

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Jay Blundell asked the following questions:
 - Firstly, about the Budget line relating to Foundry College which showed an additional £19k, she was not sure where this was coming from.
 - Secondly, about the Northern House Budget line which showed £720k for a provision that provided 67 places only (according to the catch up premium); the £720k was only part of the funding for Northern House. Last their year their funding exceeded £2.1m and she wanted to know where the rest of the funding was shown;
 - Thirdly, in relation to the Schools Block, the de-delegated Behaviour Support Services which showed a reduction of £22k due to the academisation of primary schools. She stated that this money should go back to primary schools and not to Foundry College, however it was reflected in the surplus/deficit line;
- Lynne Samuel stated that the £19k for Foundry College was in relation to an inflation uplift assumption, she offered to discuss this in more detail outside of the meeting;
- Lynn Samuel stated that the Northern House line was in relation to recoupment rate top up for HNB academies. In order to make it more transparent, Officers were asked to split the line to show each resource unit on an individual line;
- Lynne Samuel agreed to discuss with her colleagues about a better way to report the de-delegated fund, reflecting in-year changes;
- Jay Blundell asked who held the alternative education Budget of £100k. Lynne Samuel stated that this related to a number of small arrangements for EHCPs. Officers were asked to re-name that line to make it clearer;

- Ginny Rhodes requested an overview of how many EHCPs there were in each school year across the Borough, from pre-school to post-16; and where they were placed;
- Lynne Samuel stated that this information would be presented to the December meeting of Schools Forum;
- Ginny Rhodes stated that she had asked previously if every child in Year 6 had been placed into Year 7. She expressed frustration that St Crispin's had been asked to take three high needs children in the middle of the summer with no time for recruitment of staff;
- Sal Thirlway accepted that it was a challenging situation, it was important to identify the right provision for SEND children. He acknowledged that there were significant capacity issues in the Borough. However, the local authority was responding to the challenge;
- Members were concerned that the HNB issue had been ongoing for a long time, without improvement; despite many attempts from previous senior leaders;
- Shirley Austin pointed out that it would be more cost effective for the local authority to support local schools with top up arrangements than to have to pay for independent out of Borough placements;
- Sal Thirlway stated that a review of top up arrangements was part of the activity that was now re-commencing;
- Paul Miller expressed concern over the expenditure in the independent placements, which was the major cause of the HNB deficit;
- Sara Attra stated that there were not enough respite places in the Borough and she believed that Social Care and Health should contribute to the funding of these places; she believed that Schools Forum needed a better understanding of tri-partied funding.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

13 INSURANCE FOR MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Lynne Samuel presented the Insurance for Maintained Schools report.

Lynne Samuel stated that the report contained the update from the Task and Finish Group which had been set up as per Schools Forum request to look at insurance arrangements for maintained schools.

Lynne Samuel stated that due to technical issues, the final report had not been published in the agenda, she would circulate the completed report with the minutes.

Lynne Samuel stated that the Task and Finish Group had been gathering information about insurance experience from Wokingham and other local authority's maintained schools and academies, and also information about Risk Protection Arrangements (RPA).

The report provided the detail of the insurance cover offered by the Council. It was recognised that currently insurance could be purchased at a lower rate through RPA.

Lynne Samuel stated that it was proposed to remove insurance as a de-delegated offer from the 2021/22 financial year. In its place the Council would review the overall funding model and offer a revised arrangement to allow schools to purchase required cover directly through the Council's insurance team.

Lynne Samuel stated that an update report containing insurance options would be brought to the next meeting of Schools Forum.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The de-delegated insurance offer would be removed from the 2021/22 financial year;
- 2) Schools Forum would receive further updates on insurance options.

14 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT

Lynne Samuel presented the School Improvement Grant report.

Lynne Samuel stated that the report provided information about how the grant had been used.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

15 SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP REVIEW 2020

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist presented the Schools Forum Membership Review 2020 report.

Luciane Bowker stated that the review contained an analysis of current number of pupils on roll and showed that some primary schools had converted to academies since the last review.

Luciane Bowker stated that as there had not been any significant changes, it was proposed that Schools Forum continue with its current membership structure.

Paul Miller stated that an annual review of the membership was required to ensure that Schools Forum continued to fairly represent schools in the Borough.

Paul Miller stated that the results of the self-assessment survey about Schools Forum had been very positive.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Schools Forum would continue with its current membership structure.

16 SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

This item was not discussed.

17 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Request for disapplication

Katherine Vernon stated the Minimum Per Pupil Funding had been made compulsory in the funding formula for this financial year. This meant that primary schools had a protection of £4,180 per pupil, KS3 £5,215 per pupil and KS4 £5,715 per pupil.

The way the formula worked for all-through schools was that it calculated an average for all year groups, assuming that every year from reception to Year 11 had the same number of pupils. The rate for all-through schools was £4,695. In Wokingham's all through school, the numbers were not the same for all year groups, the Published Admission Number (PAN) for reception to Year 6 was 30 and the PAN for Year 7 to Year 11 was 203.

Therefore, according to this calculation this school was not going to receive the same level of funding as other secondary schools in the Borough.

Katherine Vernon stated that the local authority was seeking Schools Forum approval to submit a request for disapplication so that the school could receive the same level of funding as the other secondary schools in the Borough.

Upon being put to the vote, Schools Forum was in favour of supporting the request for disapplication.

RESOLVED That Schools Forum supports the request for disapplication to the DfE.